WASHINGTON Merry-Go-Round

by Jack Anderson

with Joe Spear

Presidents and Assassination Plots

WASHINGTON — Vice President Nelson Rockefeller recently suggested that the late President Kennedy was aware of at least one CIA assassination plot. This has touched off a big Washington controversy, involving Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson as well. Did they have advance knowledge of assassination attempts against foreign leaders?

Our sources say that none of the CIA investigations has uncovered direct evidence that past presidents were informed about the assassination plots. But the President always headed the chain of command and had the responsibility to approve or disapprove the plots.

As far back as January, 1971, we reported that the CIA had undertaken six assassination attempts against Cuban Premier Fidel Castro. At that time, we attempted to determine whether President John Kennedy had personally sanctioned the plot.

A close friend of the President, former Sen. George Smathers, told us he once had spoken to Kennedy about schemes to assassinate Castro. The late President, said Smathers, merely rolled back his eyes, indicating he was familiar with the idea but considered it too wild to discuss.

A blue-ribbon commission, of which Vice President Rockefeller is a member, has submitted to President Ford a study of the CIA in which they recommend that future presidents be dissociated from covert activities. We obtained a draft copy of the report several weeks ago.

"We...believe that the current requirement of law that the President personally certify to the Congress the necessity for all covert actions," states the report, "is harmful in associating the head of State so formally with such activities."

The panel proposed that the law be rewritten "to omit any requirement for the personal certification of the President as to their necessity."

The clear implication, therefore, is that the CIA did not operate on its own but sought approval for the assassination attempts. The secret communications channel led directly to the President's Oval Office.

It is highly unlikely, therefore, that Eisenhower, Kennedy or Johnson were kept in the dark about the assassination plots.

Use It Or Lose It: The federal government is on a buying spree that makes Jackie Onassis look like a tightwad.

The end of the government's budgeting year is approaching. And the bureaucratic rule is: "Use it or lose it."

If an agency fails to spend all its allotted money, it is criticized for requesting too much and its budget for next year is reduced. So the bureaucrats are off taking trips and conducting hasty studies. They also are buying furniture, pocket calculators, paper clips — anything to spend the taxpayers' green.

They have until June 30 to empty their coffers, or face the awful prospect of returning the money to the Treasury.

The annual spending spree, of course, leads to some ludicrous acquisitions. The General Services Administration once bought expensive oak doors for its executives, just to get rid of a budget surplus.

The annual buying binge has always been bad. But it seems worse this year, when the rest of the nation is suffering through a recession.

Supply Problems: Military strategists are worried about the tightening shortage of raw materials, which are essential to defense. Already, there is a shortage of asbestos, chromite and rayon fibers, which are used in military production.

The Pentagon strategists also are concerned about soaring prices. Cartels suddenly have been formed to control bauxite, chrome, copper, phosphate, tin and other essential raw materials. They are following the example, of course, of the oil cartel, which has successfully squeezed billions out of the oil-consuming nations.

For example, the price of aluminum, which is made from bauxite, has shot up 700 percent during the past year. Chromium, copper and titanium prices also are soaring.

The Pentagon has established a watchdog unit to keep close track of defense supplies. Meanwhile, the United States maintains a strategic stockpile of vital raw materials, the Commerce Department also sets aside some materials for military use.

Inside Job: Vandalism is on the rise at the famous FBI academy in Quantico, Va. Bureau sources say that libraries have been torn apart, police car windows have been broken, and school property has been destroyed. The crimes remain unsolved, but insiders suspect civilian employes and local police trainees are responsible.

Fear of Spending: Rep. Robert Bauman, the conservative Maryland Republican, is trying to replace Iowa's retired H.R. Gross as the House's chief penny pincher. He already has pushed through legislation which provides for congressional review of National Science Foundation grants. He also raised a howl recently when he learned that the National Arts Endowment had awarded feminist author Erica Jong $5,000 to work on her best-selling novel, "Fear of Flying."

Filthy Food: A House Appropriations Committee probe of the food warehousing industry has revealed that Americans may be eating food that's contaiminated with insects, rodent hair and general filth.

The investigators also found that food import controls were sorely lacking. In other words, bad food can make its way to American tables from foreign countries.

Yet the profits for selling imported food are often higher than the fines imposed when a dealer is caught selling bad merchandise.